

# HEBREWS

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## HEBREWS 18

Καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει

Ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα,  
καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα·

πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν

Ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [τοῦ αἰῶνος],

καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ (οὐ σου)  
ἡγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν·

διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέν σε ὁ θεός, ὁ θεός σου, ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιᾶσεως παρὰ  
τοὺς μετόχους σου.

THE often debated construction of the first half of Psalm xlv 6 (English numeration) is brought into a new light, so far as its use in the Epistle to the Hebrews is concerned, by the textual variations in the second half of the verse. Before however examining their bearing, it is advisable to reconsider briefly the sense of the Psalm itself. For the present purpose it is fortunately possible to avoid discussing delicate points of Hebrew scholarship, a subject in which I could not venture to express an independent opinion.

It would probably be allowed on all hands that according to mere grammar the two most obvious constructions are (α) "Thy throne, [O] God, [is] for ever and ever," and (β) "Thy throne [is] God for ever and ever." No philological difficulty, I believe, has been found in (β), and it would require much ingenuity to find one: if the separation of "thy throne" from "for ever and ever" were objected, it would be enough to refer to Ps. lxxiii 26, "the rock of my heart and my portion [is] God for ever," where the Hebrew arrangement is identical. Other constructions maintained on high authority, as "thy throne, [a throne of] God, [is] for ever and ever," and "thy throne [is a throne of] God for ever and ever," involve, to say the least, less obvious uses of language. They have of course been suggested by a difficulty,—not of grammar, but of interpretation in relation to the context,—which has been felt to weigh heavily against the traditional construction.

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This difficulty appears to me very great on the view, which I must here assume as true, that the Psalms should be treated as having throughout an uninterrupted primary or immediate sense, upon which must be built any legitimate higher or spiritual sense. Such a view is quite consistent with a belief that the immediate subject of a Psalm, as for instance the 72nd, may be set forth in language which could find no adequate fulfilment except in Him in whom all prophecy is fulfilled. But this consideration will not suffice to explain how a Jewish king could be addressed in a marriage-ode as himself *Elohim*. As Delitzsch explicitly acknowledges, no real precedent is afforded by the peculiar and archaic use according to which *Elohim* (with and without the article) is supposed to denote a court of judges in Exod. xxi 6; xxii 8, 9, (?? 28); Jud. v 8; 1 Sam. ii 25; or by the *El gibbor* (in the singular) of Isaiah ix 6; or by the prophecy of Zechariah (xii 8) that "he that is feeble among" the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the day of its siege "shall be as David, and the house of David [shall be] as God, as the angel of Jehovah before them," where a different idea is contained in the whole drift of the passage, and enforced by the thrice repeated word *as*. The difficulty is increased by the language of an earlier verse and of the following verse (2, 7), "therefore God hath blessed thee for ever," "therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Supposing that a psalmist could call an earthly king *Elohim*, it seems strange that he should content himself with the same designation for Him who blessed and anointed him. It is evident on comparison with other passages that the phrase "God, thy God" does not carry the required force; and though this part of the Psalter is marked by a preference for the name *Elohim*, the example of the three following Psalms shews the preference to be compatible with the use of fuller and stronger designations when need requires.

When we turn to the other constructions, that marked ( $\beta$ ) presents at least the advantage of grammatical simplicity. It has however found but few advocates, being usually set aside without argument as requiring too strange a sense. The strangeness, I venture to think, lies only on the surface. The words "Thy throne is God for ever and ever" merely concentrate in a striking shape that idea of the Davidic kingdom as resting on the kingdom of God which under various forms of expression holds so large a place in the Bible: they exhibit the Davidic king himself as resting on the

Divine King Himself. In an analogous though lower sense it is said in Isaiah xxii 23 that Eliakim the son of Hilkiah "shall be for a throne of glory to his father's house." The visible throne of the king, on which he sits to judge and to rule, is the outward symbol of the fixed unchanging stability of the kingdom which he administers in his several successive acts: well therefore might the true invisible throne of the king of Israel be declared to be nothing less than God Himself. The image is at all events not more difficult than several others which would be strange to our ears but for their familiarity. It is needless to quote the similitudes by which the relation of God to the individual Israelite is expressed in such Psalms as the 18th, 31st, and 71st. A still closer parallel is afforded by Deut. xxxiii 27, "the eternal God is thy dwelling-place," and Ps. xc 1, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place from one generation to another." He who is the permanent dwelling-place in and on which the whole people of Israel rests is also the permanent throne in and on which the king of Israel rests.

In the LXX rendering of the whole verse there is nothing which proves whether  $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  was meant to be nominative or vocative: the first clause admits ( $\alpha$ ) or ( $\beta$ ) with equal facility; the second allows both, but on the whole suggests ( $\alpha$ ). The Received text of Hebrews is an exact transcript from the LXX, following  $\aleph A$  and most MSS. in reading  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma$  in preference to B's  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\alpha\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma$ . Four variations are however to be found among the best MSS. The possible omission of  $\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma$  is of no interest here except as a departure from the Hebrew and LXX. The certain insertion of  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  before the second clause (found in one cursive of the LXX, 39) must be taken as unfavourable to any interpretation which would disturb continuity of sense throughout the verse: the supposition that it is used by the writer in his own person like the first  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  of v. 10, being not however here as in v. 10 a connecting link but rather a wedge to split a single quotation into two pieces, is neither natural nor justified by any apparent motive. Another alteration, equally certain notwithstanding the defection of D, is the interchange of subject and predicate as compared with the LXX by the substitution of  $\eta\ \rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\delta\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \epsilon\upsilon\theta\acute{\upsilon}\tau\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\delta\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\varsigma$  for  $\rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\delta\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\upsilon\theta\acute{\upsilon}\tau\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \eta\ \rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\delta\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\varsigma$ : here too a LXX cursive, 142, wholly or partly agrees. Fourthly, instead of the final  $\sigma\omicron\upsilon$  of the Hebrew and LXX,  $\aleph B$  have  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha\upsilon$ . There is an impression abroad that  $\aleph$  and B are to a great extent derived from a common original, and should there-

fore in a case like this be treated as constituting but a single authority: all the evidence known to me, with very rare and very doubtful exceptions, is unfavourable to this supposition. To the best of my belief these two great MSS. are wholly independent; and for this and other reasons their agreement in support of a reading creates a peculiarly high presumption in its favour. The absence of Versions or Fathers attesting *αὐτοῦ* is less serious than it would be with a fuller total of evidence: the clause occurs in no Old Latin authority (for *d* where it follows *D* cannot count as such), and is cited, if I mistake not, by no Father of the second, third, or fourth century. If moreover the third and fourth variations are taken together, as an interpreter is constrained to take them, the combination *ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου* is found to be presented only by AM, 17, and Cyril of Alexandria (versions uncertain); a good set of authorities, but certainly not superior to *NB*, nay rather suggesting an Alexandrine correction. It is easy to see how the conspicuous pronoun would be altered first, in agreement with the LXX, and perhaps also under the influence of the current interpretation of the Psalm: the less obvious and less intelligible transposition of the articles would suffer assimilation next: and the mere conjunction would vanish last. It seems on the other hand impossible to account for a change from *σου* to *αὐτοῦ*. As regards the evidence from interpretation, the readings *ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας* and *αὐτοῦ*, if not necessary to each other, at least sustain each other.

If *αὐτοῦ* is right, the construction marked (*β*) must be right also; for to take *ὁ θεός* as a vocative leaves *αὐτοῦ* without an antecedent, *θρόνος* and *αἰών* being out of the question. The same result follows however, I think, though less clearly, from the assured reading *ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος κ.τ.λ. . .*. If with this reading we keep *σου*, "the sceptre of uprightness" can only be a periphrasis for "God's sceptre," the preeminent sceptre of uprightness; and the affirmation must be that God's sceptre does itself rule the kingdom of the king addressed. The attribution of a Divine character to the king's sceptre involved in this interpretation suggests that a Divine character has been in the previous clause attributed to the king's throne, that is, suggests the construction "thy throne is God:" the mere ascription of permanence to his throne would make an inadequate parallel, and the inadequacy would be rather enhanced than lessened by the interposition of a vocative *ὁ θεός*. This interpretation of the second clause however, though inevitable with *σου*, involves some awkward-



nesses of language: we should not expect to find God's sceptre described as *a* sceptre of the king's kingdom, or the attribution of a Divine character transferred from the grammatical predicate to the grammatical subject. When σου is replaced by αὐτοῦ, everything falls into its right place. "The sceptre of uprightness" (that is, the sceptre whose function is to represent and enforce uprightness, not the sceptre wielded uprightly) comes to mean the sceptre of uprightness belonging to the king's throne, and so *his* sceptre of uprightness: compare ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητός σου in Cyr. Alex. *De r. fid. ad reg.* p. 73, and *virga directionis tue* (from the Psalm, not Hebrews) in Hil. *De Trin.* iv 35. Thus the statement is that the king's sceptre is a sceptre of God's own kingdom, even as his throne is God Himself. A phrase of Clement of Rome (c. 16), a writer, it will be remembered, largely conversant with our Epistle, seems to involve one or other of these two interpretations of the second clause, notwithstanding the partial change of figure; for it presupposes not uprightness (as in the LXX and the common rendering) but Divineness to be attributed to the king's sceptre: τὸ σκῆπτρον τῆς μεγαλωσύνης τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός: cf. "Hipp." *Theoph.* 6, cited by Harnack, τὰ σκῆπτρα τῆς νιοθεσίας.

In the original Psalm the second clause may be taken either as "a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (the usual construction), or as "the sceptre of uprightness" (i. e. God's sceptre, as above) "is the sceptre of thy kingdom" according as (α) or (β) is adopted in the preceding words; in the former case the second clause goes in sense with the following verse ἡγάπησας δικαιοσύνην κ.τ.λ., in the latter case it goes in sense with the first clause. Apparently the writer of the Epistle wished to mark it unambiguously as belonging to the first clause, that is, as contributing to declare the Divineness of the king's kingdom, not as recounting one of the righteousnesses for the sake of which God had preeminently anointed him; and for this purpose he inserted καί, shifted the articles, and (I believe) changed σου to αὐτοῦ. But the starting-point is the interpretation of ὁ θεός as nominative, not vocative: on the other construction the changes made from the LXX text are not merely purposeless; they give us a text which with σου is most difficult to interpret, and with αὐτοῦ impossible. It may be that the changes had been already made in some Greek text of the Psalms; and again αὐτοῦ may have had Hebrew authority, י and ך being easily confused. Whether however the writer adopted existing devia-

tions from the LXX or introduced them himself to make the meaning plain, the principal question remains the same.

For the purposes of his argument either construction would serve. If there be a difference, the vocative  $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  has at least not the advantage: so transcendent a designation was not likely to stand, with no word of special notice, in the midst of lower testimonies, or to be weakened by the addition of the verse containing  $\epsilon\chi\lambda\iota\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \sigma\epsilon\ \delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ ,  $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\ \sigma\omicron\nu$ . The nominative  $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  implies what is amply sufficient for the immediate teaching: to the Son, unlike the angels, the writer means to say, is ascribed first the function of Divine kingship (8, 9), and then the function of Divine creation (10 ff.).

How the Epistle was understood by the Christian writers of several early generations, we have no means of knowing. The Psalm, as far as appears, was for the most part read in the way that has become traditional, this being the interpretation naturally suggested by the LXX rendering of the second clause. But a passing sentence in Jerome's exposition of the Psalm (*Ep.* 65 *ad Princ.* c. 13) shews that the identification of  $\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  with the throne, not the king, obtained at least some acceptance in its theological application in ancient times: "quanquam enim Pater in Filio et Filius in Patre, et *alterutrum sibi et habitator et thronus sint*, tamen in hoc loco ad regem qui Deus est sermo dirigitur." The doctrine which he here allows, though adopting himself the other interpretation, had evidently been deduced from the text by a previous commentator.

F. J. A. H.





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